

SECTION II: CONTEXT



CHAPTER 1**INTRODUCTION****A. Purpose**

Within the State of California, a Specific Plan is a regulatory tool that local governments like Cathedral City use to implement their General Plan and to guide development in a defined, localized area within the community. While the General Plan is the recognized overall guide for growth and development in a community, a Specific Plan is able to focus on the unique characteristics of a delineated Specific Plan Area within the community by customizing the planning process and land use regulations to that defined area.

B. Overview

The North City Extended Specific Plan (SP) encompasses approximately 590 acres of vacant land located north of Interstate Highway 10 along Varner Road corridor, and is defined by Bob Hope Drive/Rio Del Sol Road on the east and Section 16 on the west. At project build-out, the SP could accommodate a unique blend of Mixed Use Development (MXD) with an equivalent of up to 200,000 square feet retail/commercial buildings; 120,000 square feet of restaurants; 190,000 square feet of office/service buildings; 595,000 square feet of light industrial; 400 hotel rooms; and 3,200 residential units. Further, a total of 240.44 acres of Open Space, or about 40% of the SP would be preserved and maintained for use as storm water retention basins, community and neighborhood parks with public recreational facilities, and a network of bikeways, multi-use pathways and pedestrian walkways.

The build-out of this mixed-use community within a newly annexed area in Cathedral City is anticipated to be phased over a fifteen (15) to twenty (20) year absorption period. The overall phasing of this development is anticipated to generally proceed east to west along the south side of the Varner Road corridor, starting in the Bob Hope Drive/ Rio Del Sol Road area on the east and growing westward toward Section 16. This is illustrated in the diagrammatic phasing plan.

1. Applicability and Conformity of Development

The provisions of this North City Extended Specific Plan shall apply to all properties located within the delineated area. No construction, modification, addition or placement of any building or structure shall occur, nor shall any new use commence on any lot, on or after the effective date of this Specific Plan that is not in conformity with the provisions of this Specific Plan.

The provisions of this Specific Plan shall not apply to development projects for which a complete application has been received by the appropriate City office on or before the effective date of this Specific Plan. However, applicants for

such projects may elect to comply with the provisions herein in lieu of the former provisions. Applications for projects whose entitlements and/or permits have expired will be required to conform to this Specific Plan.

2. Regional and City Context

Cathedral City is located in Riverside County, CA approximately 115 miles east of Los Angeles, 150 miles northeast from San Diego and 60 miles west from the City of Riverside. Within the Coachella Valley, the community is strategically located with land on both sides of the east-west Interstate Highway 10 corridor and the parallel Union Pacific Railroad corridor. Cathedral City consistently ranks in the top three cities in the Coachella Valley in terms of total population, retail sales and total taxable sales.

Cathedral City is bordered by the City of Palm Springs on the west and southwest and by the City of Rancho Mirage on the east and southeast. Unincorporated areas of Riverside County currently border Cathedral City to the north and east, along the north right-of-way line of the I-10 corridor. Figure 1-1 illustrates Cathedral City's location within the Coachella Valley.

With direct access to I-10 and the Union Pacific Railroad transportation corridor, Cathedral City has excellent accessibility to the economic development potential of the Coachella Valley. High volumes of vehicular traffic pass through Cathedral City along the I-10 corridor, particularly from weekend travelers between the Southern California region, the Colorado River, Arizona and beyond. Cathedral City's regional accessibility and mid-Valley position give it a locational advantage for homebuyers, retailers, and employers for San Bernardino, Riverside, Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties.

C. Current Setting

The North City Extended Specific Plan encompasses approximately 590 acres and is characterized by significant views and vistas in all directions as well as open desert lands. The Specific Plan is located within the northern portion of the western extents of the Coachella Valley in a geographical area known as the Colorado Desert, a subdivision of the Sonoran Desert. Both the Little San Bernardino Mountains to the north and Indio Hills to the northeast dominate the landscape in the area. Land north of I-10 remains largely undeveloped and consists of steep, sand covered slopes of the Indio Hills, natural drainage ways and washes that emanate from them, and desert open spaces. Thus, planning within the Specific Plan will need to be sensitive to the requirements of the Whitewater River Region Water Quality Management Plan in conjunction with storm drain design.

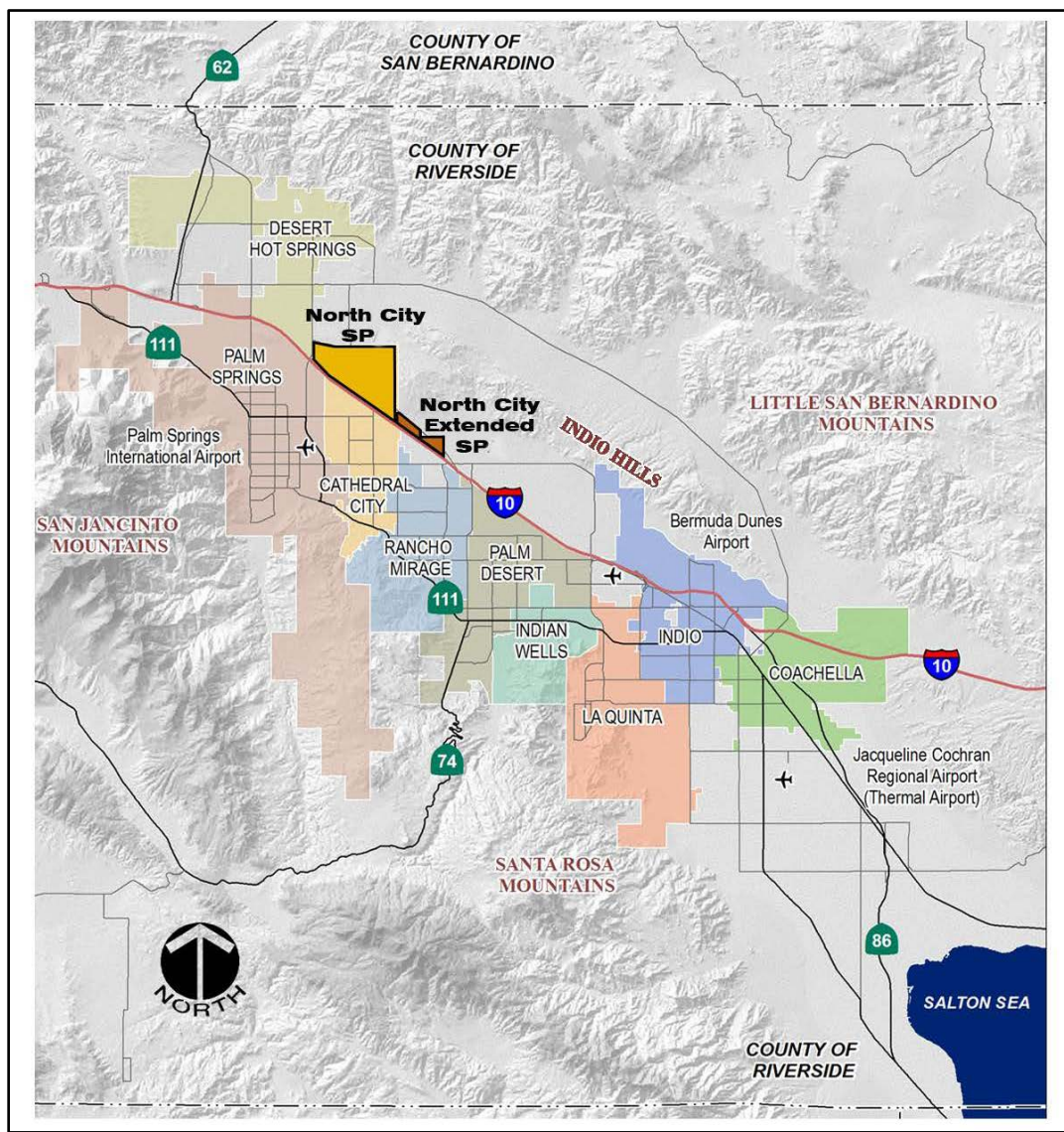


Figure 1-1: Setting within the Coachella Valley

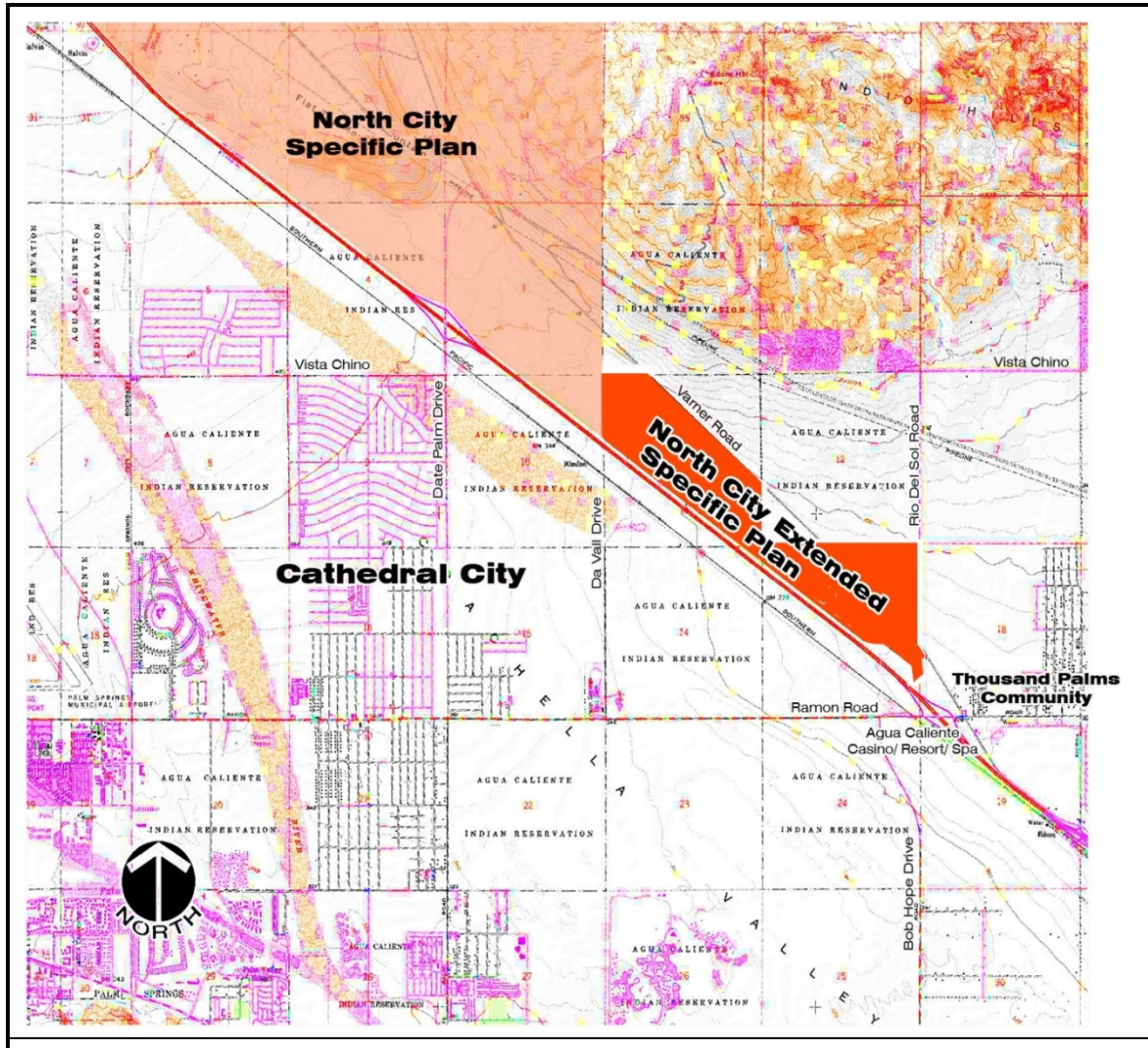


Figure 1-2: North City Extended Specific Plan



D. Regulatory Authority

The North City Extended Specific Plan (Project Number SPL 12-001) has been prepared pursuant to the provisions of the California Government Code, Title 7, Division I, Chapter 3, Article 8, Sections 65450 through 65457; and is structured as an eastward extension of the originally adopted North City Specific Plan (Project Number SPL 07-001). The California Government Code authorizes jurisdictions to adopt Specific Plans by resolution, as policy documents or by ordinance as regulatory documents. The law allows adoption of Specific Plans as appropriate for the implementation of the jurisdiction's General Plan. Chapter 9.60 (Specific Plans) of the City of Cathedral City Municipal Code (CCMC), Title 9, identifies the procedures for processing of Specific Plans in the City.

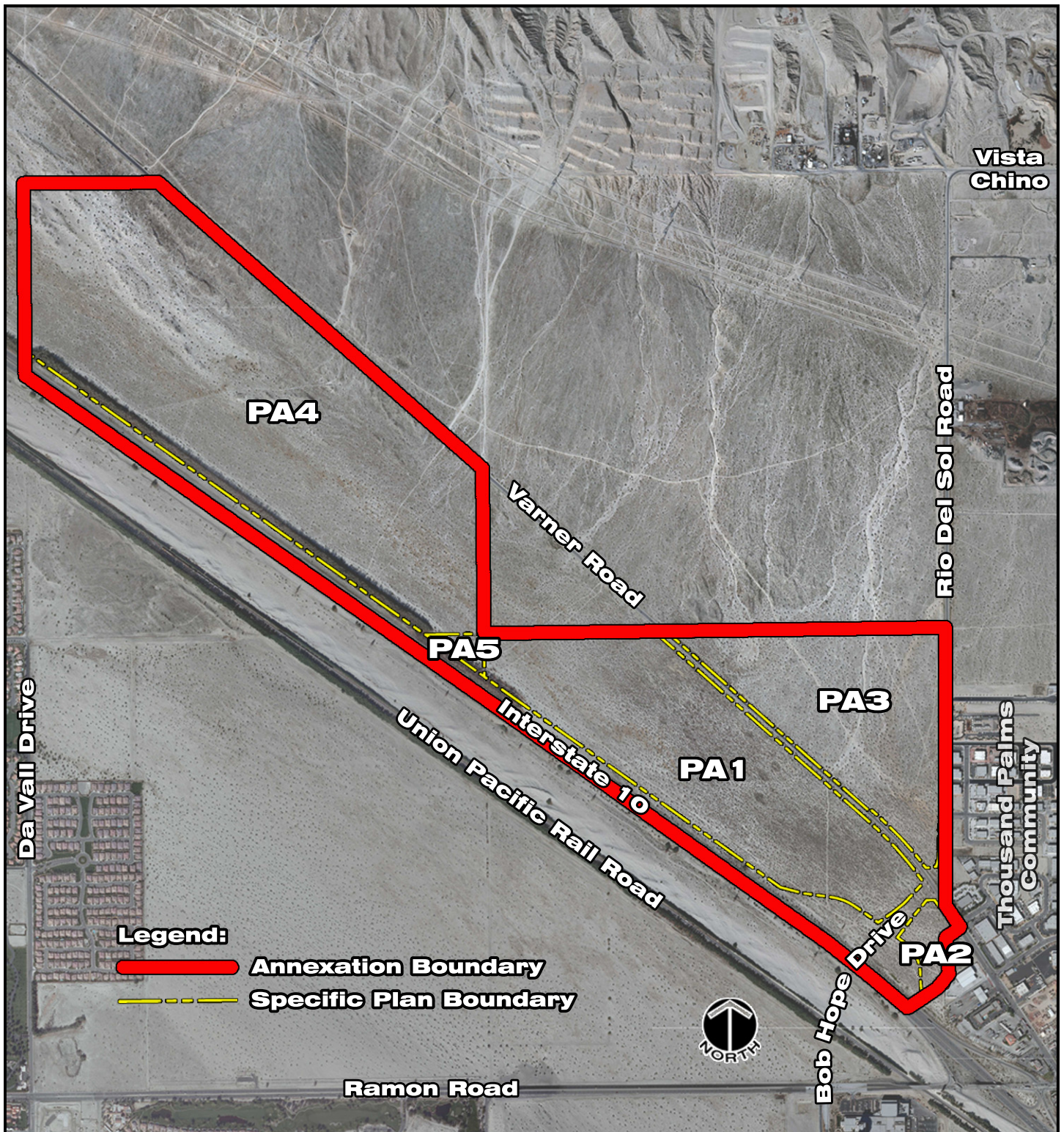
E. North City Extended Specific Plan

The North City Extended Specific Plan includes approximately 590 acres of vacant land north of Interstate Highway 10 (I-10), and is illustrated in Figure 1-1. Its general boundaries are I-10 to the south, Section 16 on the west and Bob Hope Drive/Rio Del Sol Road on the east. Varner Road bounds most of the Specific Plan area on the north, with adjustments due to property ownership as illustrated on Figure 1-2.

This North City Extended Specific Plan has been prepared as an easterly extension of the previously prepared and adopted North City Specific Plan (July 2009). The original North City Specific Plan area includes nearly 5,000 acres of mostly undeveloped land north of I-10 and is also illustrated in Figure 1-2.

The Following figure 1-3, "Aerial Photograph of Specific Plan and Environs", illustrates the annexation and Specific Plan boundaries. The Interstate-10 right-of-way is included in the annexation area but excluded for the Specific Plan area.

Figure 1-4 "Jurisdictions Map" illustrates the Cathedral City Sphere of Influence boundary and the MSHCP boundary in comparison to the North City Extended Specific Plan boundary.



Aerial Photograph of Specific Plan and Environs

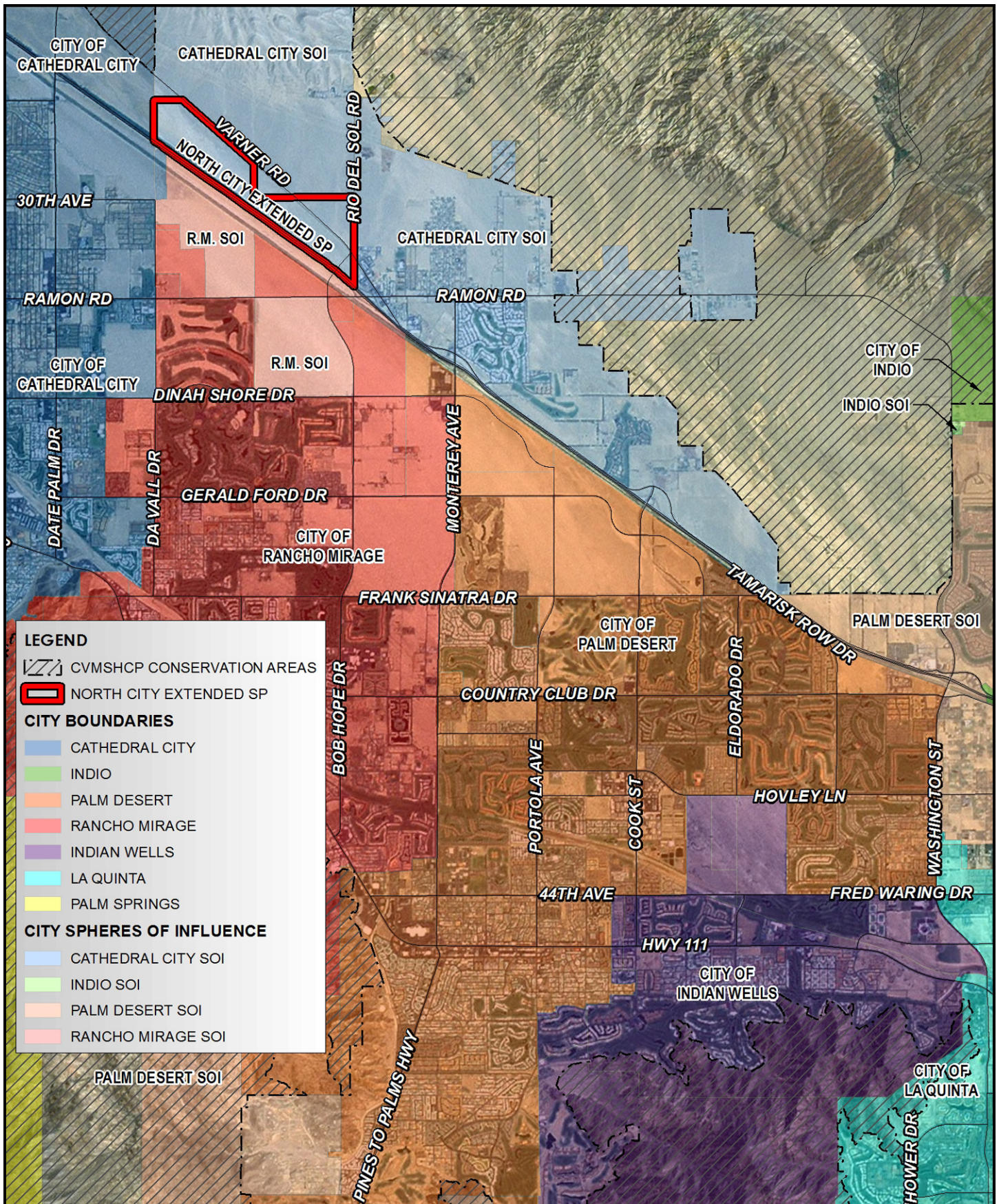
Figure 1-3

Page 6



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Jurisdictions Map

Figure 1-4

Page 7

1. Objectives of the Specific Plan

Since its incorporation in 1981, Cathedral City has developed almost entirely to the south of I-10, and is largely built-out. Significant growth is expected to continue in the City and region. The Coachella Valley is one of the fastest growing areas in Riverside County, and these briefly summarized factors caused the City of Cathedral City to initiate, prepare and adopt the North City Specific Plan in 2009, which includes an area of approximately 5,000 acres defined by Palm Drive on the east, with Varner Road running NW-SE through the Specific Plan area.

Continuing population growth and economic development opportunities create ongoing development pressure on vacant land north of and along the I-10 corridor, stimulating an interest by Cathedral City to extend the North City Specific Plan eastward to the Thousand Palms area. This document, the North City Extended Specific Plan, has been prepared as a private developer-initiated effort in response to this growing demand for future development. Thus, Cathedral City views this Specific Plan as a tool to:

- Take a long-term view of what land uses are appropriate in this area
- Maintain a jobs-housing balance within the community;
- Create new opportunities to expand its economic base; and
- Create a high quality of life for future generations of City residents.

The overall **Purpose** of this North City Extended Specific Plan is to:

Establish a development framework that is fully coordinated with the original North City Specific Plan, as an extension of that plan, to facilitate and encourage development and improvements to help realize the community's vision for this area.

Further, this document is a tool to help City decision-makers and staff plan public improvement projects, promote cohesive development and evaluate public and private development proposals. New construction on private property will be regulated through the land use policies, development standards, and design standards of this North City Extended Specific Plan. This document also sets forth strategies for financing and construction of public improvements such as circulation, infrastructure, parks and streetscape improvements.

The **Objectives** of this Specific Plan are to:

- *Direct the location and intensity of new development;*
- *Guide associated infrastructure and public services;*
- *Balance the provision of job creation and housing opportunities;*

- *Implement the conservation criteria established under the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) as they may apply to this delineated Specific Plan;*
- *Guide all elements of design for appropriate use in this unique desert environment.*
- *Capitalize on the natural resources that exist in this Specific Plan; and*
- *Encourage sustainable, energy-efficient community development, such as natural scenic vistas.*

2. Relationship to the General Plan

A General Plan Amendment (GPA 12-001) has been initiated concurrently with this Specific Plan (Project Number SPL 12-001) to ensure consistency between the North City Extended Specific Plan and the Cathedral City General Plan.

This Specific Plan is supportive of Cathedral City General Plan policies and programs that provide the use of “Community, Area, Specific and Precise Plans” as part of the General Plan to address detailed design, land use and policy direction for a particular area within Cathedral City and as a method of detailed and systematic implementation of the General Plan (General Plan, Administration Element, Policy 2 and Program 2A).

3. Relationship to the Zoning Ordinance

The property will be pre-zoned as part of the annexation process. The City intends to apply the zones proposed under this Specific Plan. Adoption of this Specific Plan will finalize new zoning designations for the Specific Plan area that incorporate all of the standards for land use and development set forth in this Specific Plan. The regulations of this Specific Plan replace those set forth in the planning and zoning provisions of the Cathedral City Municipal Code, and any other applicable ordinances. Where land use regulations and/or development standards of Planning and Zoning Ordinance (Title 9) of the CCMC are inconsistent with this Specific Plan, the standards and regulations of the Specific Plan shall prevail and supersede the applicable provisions of the Planning and Zoning Ordinance. Instances where the provisions of the CCMC are not addressed in the Specific Plan, the provisions of the CCMC shall prevail.

This Specific Plan does not convey any rights not otherwise granted under the provisions and procedures contained in the Zoning Code and other applicable ordinances, except as specifically provided herein. Any issue not specifically covered in this Specific Plan shall be subject to the CCMC. The Code provides for City Planner and/or Planning Commission interpretations.

The North City Specific Plan included sections that are not applicable to this Specific Plan, for which no changes are contemplated by this Specific Plan, these sections are:

- Relationship to Recently Annexed Areas
- Relationship to the Agua Caliente Reservation Land
- Relationship to the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP)
- Relationship to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

An EIR, prepared in conjunction with the preparation of this Specific Plan, establishes the existing, on-site environmental conditions and evaluated the potential impacts posed by this Specific Plan. The EIR contains a series of mitigation measures (see Chapter 13) that are either: 1) design features of the Specific Plan; or 2) will be imposed on subsequent projects in the Specific Plan consistent with the Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program via conditions of project approvals.

F. Community Participation

Due to the large number of private property owners included within its Specific Plan the original North City Specific Plan was created with the involvement of a Steering Committee and extensive public outreach and participation. Input to the Specific Plan was obtained through a series of public workshops where residents, property owners, affected agencies and interested parties provided ideas and refinements to the project team through group discussion and feedback on the topics and direction of the Specific Plan.

Four public workshops, well-advertised through press releases, public notices, flyers and the City's website, were held over the course of the project at key stages in the planning process. Four meetings at these same key stages were also held with the North City Specific Plan Steering Committee. The Steering Committee consisted of over 20 members, including several landowners within the North City Specific Plan and representatives of the City's Commissions, Council and other involved agencies.

The role of the Steering Committee was to bring the community's values, knowledge and ideas into the planning process, and to provide continuity and feedback throughout the duration of the project. These sessions with the public and Steering Committee generated significant dialogue and provided valuable direction for the original North City Specific Plan.

In structuring the work program for this developer-initiated North City *Extended* Specific Plan, Cathedral City staff recommended an alternate public outreach process for the following reasons:

- This Specific Plan is an *extension* of the previously prepared North City Specific Plan which received very thorough community input leading to plan and policy recommendations, and this Specific Plan attempts to achieve consistency and connectivity with that initial Specific Plan;
- There are only three (3) major property owners included within this Specific Plan, and their preferred land use considerations individually and in a coordinated manner have been addressed;
- The Thousand Palms community which will be impacted by the implementation of this Specific Plan has three identified stakeholder groups which were included in the outreach process by the developer in cooperation with the City: 1) The Thousand Palms Preservation Group; 2) The Thousand Palms Community Council; and 3) The Thousand Palms Chamber of Commerce.
- The Development team participated with staff in guiding three (3) community outreach workshops with: 1) The Thousand Palms Preservation Group; 2) Thousand Palms Community Council; and 3) Thousand Palms Chamber of Commerce.

The results of this outreach process for the North City Extended Specific Plan were consistent with and confirmed the vision, goals and policies of the original North City Specific Plan, thus validating the effort to structure this Specific Plan as an extension of the original Specific Plan.

G. Support Documents

Several documents were prepared as background information during the analysis phase that support the recommendations of this Specific Plan. These supporting documents are listed in Appendix B and are available at the Cathedral City Planning Department. Other documents prepared in conjunction with the Specific Plan, including the EIR, are also listed in the appendices.

